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## SURVEYS AS MATERIAL FOR PROFESSIONAL STUDY IN TEACHERS' MEETINGS

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Superintendents are agreed, I suppose, that it is important to have their teachers continue their professional training while in service, however high may be the standard required for entering upon that service. Such continued training may be effected through a variety of agencies, including summer-school study, institutes, lectures, extension classes, reading of teachers' journals and other literature of the profession, sabbatical or more frequent leave of absence for study, grade or other teachers' meetings, etc. In most good school systems many or all of these means of growth are encouraged. Indeed, all of them are used freely here in Decatur; but few, if any of them, have seemed to us more profitable than the series of meetings held last year with our principals and supervisors, and the year before with the whole teaching corps for the study of the surveys selected for that purpose.

During the year 1913-14 McMurry's *Elementary School Standards* was the basis of study and discussion in a series of six or seven general teachers' meetings led by the superintendent. As is well known, this book is an outgrowth of Dr. McMurry's part of the official report of the New York City schools survey, and is a discussion of the quality of the classroom teaching in the elementary schools of that city, as interpreted in the light of the qualitative standards formulated and used by the surveyor and author.

The standards formulated and applied are (1) motive on the part of the pupils, (2) weighing of values, (3) organization of ideas, (4) initiative by pupils. As the author states, these four are not the only standards that may be applied to a recitation; they are indeed, not the only *qualitative* standards; but there can be no doubt that the teacher who attempts to teach every lesson in such a way that it may exhibit the four values named above is a better teacher than she would otherwise be.

Large numbers of the Decatur teachers were already familiar with the same author's *Teaching Children How to Study* in which the same standards are discussed, but the newer study in which these standards were applied as a measuring stick to the teaching of every subject in the elementary schools of New York City gave the teachers added familiarity with them and increased their respect for them at the same time. As was expected, it reacted upon the teaching of our own teachers, making it easy in scores of rooms to see a more or less conscious attempt on the part of our teachers to improve their teaching by larger provision for motives and incentives for study; by more frequent exercise of the critical faculties of children in passing judgment upon the worth of matter read or discussed; by more numerous attempts to organize and to have children organize the subject-matter of instruction; and by encouraging more self-activity and initiative on the part of the children who had been too largely receptive and passive before.

In the meetings there were frequently interesting dissents from the author's view by those teachers who felt that his standards are partial, inadequate, wrong, unscientific, or inapplicable to certain subjects, or certain phases of still other subjects. Naturally we welcomed all such discussion when it sprang from conviction, and considered it a better omen than we could have considered unquestioned acceptance of every dictum in the text.

Valuable as this study was, we decided to follow it the next year with surveys of another type, so last year we had a series of meetings for a comparative study of the Boise, Springfield, Portland, Butte, and South Bend surveys. As indicated above, this study was undertaken, not in general teachers' meetings, but in our "cabinet meetings" with principals and supervisors. The chief reason for limiting it to the cabinet was the fact that the whole teaching body was divided into committees having rather frequent meetings for the formulation and reorganization of the course of study. We did not wish professional meetings to become too burdensome to them.

An approach was made to these surveys through a brief consideration of the personnel of each surveying staff; the length of time given to each; the size of the system surveyed; and the table

of contents of each report that gives a general notion, upon comparison with the others, of those phases of the surveys which were common to all, and those which were more or less distinctive and unique.

As frequently as possible under the limitations of time and talent at our disposal we made comparisons of Decatur's system and those under immediate review. Such comparisons result, of course, in self-congratulation at times; but in certain instances they as surely set up ideals, which the pride and ambition of the members of this cabinet will lead them to try to reach, and to inspire the teachers themselves to reach, in our own schools.

Again, many phases of a system need the co-operation not alone of principals, teachers, and supervisors, but of taxpayers, community leaders, and board of education, before desirable standards can be reached. This is especially true of those matters which admit of quantitative measurement, and which on being measured make comparisons easy and profitable and quickly indicate one's place in a scale. Facts concerning a physical school plant—floor space, air space, hall space, lighting area, square feet of playground per pupil, etc.—fall in this category. Then again, size of classes; salaries, training, previous teaching experience and certification of teachers; per capita cost of the schools; amount of retardation; relation of census to enrolment and to average attendance; relation of high-school enrolment to enrolment in the elementary school; agencies for educational extension; provision for exceptional children, for medical inspection, etc.—these are among the aspects of a system of schools which can most easily be changed, if they need change, when considered in the light of similar phases of other systems. If the change in question is one calling for community action, or the action of the board of education, it is doubly advantageous for the superintendent to be able to justify his recommendations by citing such experiences in favor of them as may be found in those surveys.

In Decatur our recommendations of larger playground facilities, smaller classes, better salaries, school extension activities, and more classes for exceptional children have all been given added weight by the fact that principals and supervisors here have made

such studies, and have therefore been in a position to justify our recommendations by citations of the experiences of systems elsewhere. It means much to have twenty or twenty-five of the leaders in a city's schools conversant with the practices and standards prevailing in other schools. The excellent available material in these surveys makes it not only possible for the superintendent to have the comparative data he needs in his administration, but, what is scarcely less important, it enables him to make of his leading associates and subordinates advocates of his policies and requests before the bar of local public opinion.

In such a matter as per capita cost of instruction, maintenance, operation, or administration, nothing so effectively shields a superintendent against adverse criticism as the ability to turn to tables giving cost of similar items in other cities where expenditures are larger. Such statistical information is found in most of these surveys, and the reputation of the surveyors is such as to leave no doubt in the mind of the average man as to the truthfulness and accuracy of the information.

The space given in a few of the survey reports to the course of study used and to critical comments upon the teaching of relatively unimportant facts in the various subjects, compels the thoughtful attention of the teacher who reads and discusses the report. When a course of study is so made as to embody the best judgment, sociological and psychological, that can be utilized in making it and when the best textbooks that can be found have been adopted and put in the hands of pupils, it still remains necessary for teachers to use their sense of proportion, of relative values, in making assignments and conducting recitations. Some paragraphs, some chapters, and some topics within the compass of the course of study or the confines of a textbook need more attention than can be easily indicated in any external way. The teacher, therefore, who spends time in elaborating and emphasizing non-essentials; who teaches lists in the spelling of words, e.g., that no child and very few adults will ever need; who teaches much geography wholly unrelated to the probable needs of adult life—such a teacher is missing her opportunity and wasting valuable time that could be more profitably spent by her and her pupils. Such conditions are brought

to light in these surveys and such teaching is properly evaluated in them. If the superintendent who uses these surveys with his teachers is really trying in other ways to teach this lesson to his teachers, he has in the surveys objective and concrete illustrations of the question at issue. He has an ally to aid and abet him in his teaching and to give added weight and authority to his words without provoking any of the attempts at self-justification which sometimes characterize his teachers whom he may have occasion to criticize for kindred errors.

The method of measuring the achievement of pupils through the application of standard tests, illustrated and emphasized in most of the surveys, is one which cannot fail to be profitable to the teachers of any system taking up the study of these reports, unless the use of these tests already has wide currency and the favorable attention of the teachers in it.

In Decatur not a little use had already been made of most of the tests under review in the survey reports. In all such cases the teachers had a growing appreciation of their own work in the consciousness that they were keeping step with the scientific march in pedagogical movements of the day. There is a stimulus that comes to a teacher from such a source as from few other sources. Indeed, if teachers are closely supervised, and their work is followed up from day to day in the effort to point out to them their errors of omission and commission, they need the encouragement that can only come from making them conscious that the big, worth-while things they do are worthy of the respect and commendation of school experts everywhere as well as their immediate supervisors. Seeing the widespread use of standard tests in representative cities throughout the country makes any corps of teachers more charitable in their attitude toward these innovations. Seeing the results of these tests in many subjects and many places makes it all the easier, of course, for a teacher to determine for herself what standard of achievement she ought to expect her class to reach. If her class thus measured is seen to be far below the average for such classes elsewhere, she knows that it is time to seek the cause, and to apply the remedy needed, if possible. If, on the other hand, her class is much above, she is entitled to self-congratulation.

Perhaps, too, she is justified in slighting a given phase of her work for a time while she attempts to raise the standard of achievement in some other line which is known to be too low.

In systems of schools that have thus far made little or no use of standard tests—and there are still many such—there is certainly a splendid avenue of approach to their introduction in the survey reports available. A beginning of careful measurements of the results of instruction is easily made in any one of a half-dozen lines. After the beginning, the superintendent's problem is to lead his teachers into an appreciation of the validity of such measurements. In the accomplishment of this purpose, I doubt whether there is any available pedagogical literature that can be more effectively used with teachers than the survey reports referred to above.